

Preventing bear problems is everyone's responsibility

by Liz Jozwiak

In the last few weeks, residents have been seeing bears frequenting their property, or traveling through their neighborhood. About half of the people I spoke to indicated that they were building a new home in a new subdivision this year. The other half who were in established neighborhoods mentioned that their neighbors were leaving trash cans or garbage bags outside, or had issues with overfilled dumpsters in the area.

Alaskans are faced with the challenge of sharing habitats with brown and black bears because of the increased human population, resource development, and other human-related activities. New subdivisions and new houses are encroaching into existing bear habitat that in the past has been used for denning, feeding, and raising their young.

Bears can be attracted into our communities and yards by a variety of attractants. As local Kenai peninsula residents, it is our responsibility to reduce the likelihood of bears being drawn to our neighborhood by taking an active role in reducing a variety of natural and human related enticements.

KEEP YOUR GARBAGE AND ANIMAL FEED SECURED. This is probably the biggest attractant for bears in our area. Store garbage and animal feed inside secure buildings or in bear-proof containers. Bears like pet food, horse feed, meat scraps and fish. Keep them in a secure place. Keep your garbage secured until just before scheduled pickup. If you take your garbage to a collection site, do so regularly. Make sure to place it in the dumpster and close the lid. These collection sites attract bears. Make sure that you do not store garbage outside or in your vehicle. Pickup truck toppers are not bear proof, and we must remember that it is the smells that draw the bears to a specific location.

CLEAN YOUR FISH AT THE RIVER. This is another big one. Fish remains attract bears. Do not throw your fish guts into a dumpster. It is much better to clean your fish at the river, and throw your fish guts and waste into the middle of the current where it can get "recycled" by another organism downstream. I have responded to residents who have reported a brown bear hanging around their house later to find

out they were dumping their fish carcasses behind their house, or attempting to bury it there.

REMOVE BIRD FEEDERS FOR THE SUMMER MONTHS. Bird feeders have played a very serious role in attracting bears into residential neighborhoods. There is no legitimate reason to have feeders up in summer as there are plenty of natural foods available at that time. If you must have a bird feeder, be sure to wait until late November before filling it with seed, and don't forget to take it down before the bears come out in spring, usually by early March. Also, be sure not to store your bird seed outside.

It is not illegal to leave bird feeders filled when bears may be feeding, or to do other things which may attract wild animals to your back yard. At the same time, a neighbor that keeps a bird feeder out of season endangers everyone living in the community. A bear attracted by a feeder may end up injuring someone. If you have a neighbor that is not considering the safety of the bears and the community, try talking to them.

LIMIT WHAT GOES IN YOUR COMPOST HEAP. Many residents are ecologically minded, and compost can be a critical part of their waste reduction plans. At the same time, it is important to limit what we place in our compost heaps. Avoid placing any meat by-products such as fish, meat, bones, egg shells, dairy products or fruit into your compost. Adding some lime to your compost can also speed up the decomposition and reduce the smell.

KEEP A CLEAN BARBECUE. There's nothing like a summer barbecue on the patio. The smell of a juicy steak can permeate the air and attract much more than envious glances from non-barbecuing neighbors. These same smells can attract a bear to your deck once you head to bed. When you have finished eating, make sure to burn the food off of the grill, or at least clean the barbecue carefully. Also, if you store your barbecue outside, be sure to use a cover as this will reduce the smell emanating from it.

GARDEN PLACEMENT. Place your garden so it doesn't attract bears. Placing your garden in the open, away from cover and game trails, helps to discourage bears.

DOMESTIC ANIMALS DRAW BEARS. Keep

them where they are safe. Chickens and rabbits kept in outside pens are easy and attractive prey.

ELECTRIC FENCES. If used properly, electric fences can keep bears out of gardens, apiaries, and compost piles.

Preventing bear problems is everyone's responsibility. Work within your neighborhood and community to encourage others to manage their garbage, dog food, birdseed—anything that might attract a bear. Encourage your neighbors not to put out garbage for pickup the night before. If there is a bear in the neigh-

borhood, let people know. Work together to protect your neighborhood and to conserve bears.

The Kenai NWR has several pamphlets available at the front desk on being “bear aware” in our community entitled: Living in Harmony with Bears, Fishing in Bear Country, and Bear Facts.

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